



CONNECTICUT RESOURCES RECOVERY AUTHORITY

COMMENTARY

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Further Information: Paul Nonnenmacher, (860) 757-7771
E-mail: pnonnenmacher@crra.org

Act to Ensure Waste Plants Benefit Public

(From the *New Haven Register*)

By **MICHAEL A. PACE**

Connecticut electric ratepayers are in an uproar over the consequences of a well-intentioned but flawed restructuring of the power industry. Deregulation was supposed to foster competition, thus lowering prices, but demand has increased while little new generation has been built in Connecticut. Add higher fuel costs and our power prices have skyrocketed.

Our trash disposal system could have a similar costly future if we fail to act now. Connecticut solid-waste ratepayers – that’s all of us – can’t afford a flawed restructuring of the waste system in Connecticut. This is especially true given the ambitious Solid Waste Management Plan just issued by the Department of Environmental Protection. Our trash disposal system could have a similar costly future if we fail to act now to protect the interests of ratepayers.

Currently, most of our garbage goes to six trash-to-energy plants located around Connecticut. They use trash to produce clean, renewable electric energy. Five of these facilities are owned and controlled for public benefit by public authorities like the Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority. This system has served the state well, safely disposing of more than 2.1 million tons of trash each year and generating 194 megawatts of clean energy for Connecticut.

Four of these publicly-owned facilities – in Bridgeport, Wallingford, Bristol and Preston – could, under certain circumstances, come under private control beginning in two years, meaning trash-to-energy plants representing about 57 percent of the state’s disposal capacity would no longer be operated for public benefit but rather for private profit. Importantly, private control of our waste disposal will also open the door for those plants to garbage from other states.

Connecticut already produces upwards of 400,000 tons more waste per year than facilities in the state can handle. Do we really want thousands of new trucks hauling garbage into these plants while even more trucks take our added excess garbage out of our state? Shouldn’t these facilities, financed with Connecticut bonds and taxes, be dedicated to serving and benefiting Connecticut?

The new Solid Waste Management Plan asks us to recycle with vigor and commitment: an extraordinarily aggressive but attainable goal to recycle 58 percent of Connecticut’s trash, up from the current level of 30 percent. We at CRRA are already working to get us there – in fact, we’re building a new state-of-the-art recycling facility in Hartford and planning to develop another in Stratford.

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Connecticut cannot meet these goals if it allows public facilities to be operated exclusively for private benefit. Let's keep waste disposal facilities public and insure Connecticut facilities will always serve Connecticut needs first. Let's learn from our experience with electric deregulation.

Michael A. Pace is chairman of the Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority.